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**THE DOGS OF WAR: MELANCHOLY AND
THE INFINITE SADNESS OF
RAFAEL ALBERTI AND
MARÍA TERESA LEÓN**

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The lost other is not simply
brought inside the ego, as one
might shelter a wayward dog.
Judith Butler,
The Psychic Life of Power

Part I: Alberti

In the mid-1990s, María Asunción Mateo, Rafael Alberti's second wife, undertook a book project which was in large part motivated by what she felt were an inordinate number of missing links in her husband's trilogy of memory texts, *La arboleda perdida*.¹ Her book, *Rafael Alberti: de lo vivido y lejano* (1996), is made up of a series of conversations between husband and wife, but the sense of the text is that of the oral interview: Mateo is asking Alberti about his life and not vice versa. This type of book, particularly one about Alberti (1902-1999), runs the risk of being terribly "cursi" and not especially informative, to say the least. However, in this case, Mateo is a shrewd witness to Alberti's life and fame and an even better reader of his *Arboleda*. She claims that she is in no way seeking to rewrite or

discredit his beautiful memoirs, and yet she is able to make some astonishing suggestions for their improvement:

- ¿Has dejado muchas cosas por contar en tu *Arboleda*?
- La verdad es que no lo sé . . .
- Vamos, Rafael . . . (68)

Then on the next page she says:

- ¿Tienes idea de la cantidad de personas que desfilan por la *Arboleda*?
- Ni la más ligera idea, aunque sí sé que, a veces, en el segundo tomo, he citado demasiados nombres totalmente innecesarios. [. . .]
- Siempre puede rectificarse en posteriores ediciones. [she says].
- Eso no estaría mal, a veces lo he pensado [. . .] menos guía telefónica. (69)

Mateo is clearly prodding for some explanation or revelation as to the absences (“has dejado mucho por contar”) and the hypercommunicativity or busyness (“guía telefónica”) of the *Arboleda*. What she is on the trail of, but never is able to pin down (or refuses to suggest?), is the melancholic nature of the avoidance and the excessive name-dropping. To press Alberti on these issues indicates her suspicion that underneath these diversionary tactics there is a narrative of pain that the memoirs emit but do not admit.

Even earlier in her book, Mateo proves her emotional sophistication when she goes right for what I consider to be the primary incongruity in Alberti’s memoirs, which is the overwhelming presence of dogs. Throughout the first four books of the *Arboleda*, Alberti dedicates more space, more passion, more lyrical prose, more anecdotal attention to what Marjorie Garber calls “dog love” in her 1996 book by the same title than to any other relationship in his life, including his marriage to María Teresa León (1903-1988) or their daughter, Aitana. The dogs chronologize the course of his life, with each canine companion

representing a period, a house, a country, a book of poetry. Mateo, clearly intrigued by an attachment to the canine species that goes far beyond the mere “love for animals,” discusses with Alberti this quirky aspect of his life and his autobiography:

—Los animales me conmueven, a veces, más que las personas, aunque parezca una brutalidad. Son tan indefensos, están tan entregados a nosotros. (44)

—Desde tu exilio argentino hablabas de tus perros americanos y los ligabas a la nostalgia del regreso.

—Yo hablaba con mis perros, que nunca se separaban de mí; creo que ellos me entendían, sabían de mis angustias y de mis alegrías y sobre todo, de ese deseo al que nunca renuncié: volver a España. (45)

Alberti himself makes the representational connection between his “never relinquished desire” to return home and the animals that serve him as companion. The wording Alberti employs endows the dogs with two qualities, one metaphoric and the other anthropomorphic. The dog is some kind of fellow sufferer and memorial token of home symbolizing Alberti’s nostalgia. The dog *is* the nostalgia that both she (Alberti had mostly female dogs) and her master experience. The dogs *know* his desire for return (“sabían de mi deseo”), and, like his desire and his melancholia, the dogs are never separate from him (“nunca se separaban de mí”).

Before I turn my attention to the function of dogs in Alberti’s *Arboleda*, I want to point out that, although María Teresa León’s dog love nowhere reaches the levels of her husband’s, her brilliant and moving memoir, *Memoria de la melancolía* (1970), does, nevertheless, protagonize dogs at crucial moments in her account of her personal trajectory within the context of Spain’s political history. The strong presence of dogs, especially when read in light of so many other missing pieces in this couple’s respective autobiographies, is disconcerting since it cannot be easily explained. It is one thing to love animals, and it is yet another to utilize animals as a discursive maneuver in

order to say something about your life, your country, your politics, your literary self-fashioning. Both *Memoria* and *Arboleda* present a series of episodes which I suspect will lay bare the connection between the overdetermined image of the canine and the workings of melancholia. I offer here close readings of these episodes using the above epigraph as a guide.

The choice of dogs as the object of an analysis that seeks to unveil the melancholic workings of these autobiographical books is admittedly heterodox. However, other texts from popular culture substantiated my instinct that the appearance of dogs often indicates the presence of traumatic sadness.

There is something about a pet dog that is automatically reminiscent of home, and it has a "family values" type of logic: the family pet belongs to the family, and family means home, home is where the heart is, etc. As Marjorie Garber explains, the Lassie series both arouses the American viewer's nostalgia for a bygone era (the more indeterminate the better, perhaps) and is a part of American nostalgia (in the sense of those television series or movie series that are like collectibles, paraphernalia). Lassie long ago became a worldwide superstar, and the ideals she represents have been culturally transferable.

Television is not the only popular medium where this association is drawn between the canine and human suffering. The title of this essay, "The Dogs of War: Melancholy and the Infinite Sadness of Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León," is my play on the Grammy award-winning double album, *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, by the alternative musical rock group, *The Smashing Pumpkins*. The title of their hugely successful album captures, ingeniously, what might be thought of as an instinctual connection between the Lassie breed, Collie, and sadness, or melancholia. They tease out the particular way the dog, with his "sad puppy dog eyes," and especially the collie, often appears as a melancholic icon.²

Lassie functions as an appropriate example not only of the ideal of home but of the links between dogs and home-coming that has been a mainstay in Western literature since Odysseus and Argos. It is not merely that the dog is a sign of fidelity but that the animal stays faithful to his owner *through memory* that gives the dog its significance in stories about exile and return:

As is clear from their titles, *Homeward Bound* and *Far from Home*, like *Lassie Come Home*, draw both literally and liberally on the quality of “nostalgia,” a bittersweet longing for things, persons, or situations of the past, a kind of cultural homesickness, from the Greek word *nostos*, a return home, Home is where the dog is. [. . .] Whether exemplified in classical literature [. . .] or in the daily lives of pet owners, it is an article of faith that Bowser remembers. Remembers good times. Remembers *us*. (Garber 38-39)

Humans and dogs participate in an exchange of traumatizing comings and goings, absences and deliverances. The lost dog (the exile) arouses panic in the family and pity in the community; the stray dog (the banished or abandoned) elicits pity in his rescuer and indignation in the community. The heroic dog's acts of heroism often involve locating, finding, rescuing, retrieving something or someone lost. In this way the dog not only symbolizes and inspires a nostalgic feeling, but he or she simultaneously represents the pain of impermanence. Relying once again on the Lassie phenomenon, Garber says: “Lassie, it might be argued, is in a sense that which cannot belong to anyone. The power of the ‘Lassie principle,’ for the imagination, and the emotions, is the power of the lost-and-found, the lost-in-order-to-be-found, the found-only-to-be-lost-again, that waits at the gate” (59).

All of the dogs for whom Alberti was master were stray or abandoned. When Alberti gave shelter to wandering dogs in Argentina, he was reciprocating the gesture of asylum that his host country had extended to him. By providing refuge to stray dogs and adopting them and loving them as his, Alberti re-cites, through an emotional reversal, the roles of his own exilic circumstances. Alberti lets on that the dog has always been a window onto (a mirror of?) his soul, or at least a symbol of that part of himself which gets lost and wanders until he can return.

The associative network of loss that gives structural and thematic unity to Alberti's memoirs has its origin in the initial loss of *la arboleda perdida*, which is less a place than it is a ref-

erence to the forced abandonment of his home in El Puerto de Santa María. Throughout his life, all other losses are filtered through his nostalgia for his birthplace and the little dog he had there as a child. The dog love reaches all the way back to Alberti's birth: "nos acompañaba la Centella, una perrita negra, moruna, nacida el mismo día que yo en el rincón de una alberca sin agua" (1: 20). The boy and his dog grew up together until the Alberti family had to move to Madrid: "¡Centella! Ya tenemos casi catorce años. Pronto te llevaré a Madrid. Allí hay muy buenos oculistas . . ." (1: 91). But the aged Centella did not make it to Madrid, for she was left behind when the family moved. Much of the trauma of his very first experience of exile is due to his guilt at abandoning the nearly blind Centella, who died of her broken heart: "Sucedió que la desventurada perrita, al encontrar cerrado el portón de su casa, se sentó noche y día en el escabel a esperar fielmente nuestro regreso. [. . .] Seguramente, luego, mi familia olvidó este pobre episodio, no así yo, al que todavía duele, soléndolo contar, tal vez como descargo, siempre que de perros se trata" (1: 99).

Over the course of his life, the sheer number of dogs that Alberti takes in (to assuage his guilt over Centella?) is impressive; in Argentina alone, he harbors Tusca, Katy, Guagua, Muki, Alano, Diana, and Jazmín. The repetitiousness of the act of taking in a displaced creature, a loss, identifies the behavior symptomatic of melancholia. Every time he welcomes a new dog into his home, it is as if (he says so himself) he performs a version in miniature of his fantasy of loss and homecoming to Spain: "sabían de mis angustias y de mis alegrías y sobre todo, de ese deseo al que nunca renuncié: volver a España" (45). Not only are the dogs knowledgeable about their master's desires, they are also never separate from him in the same way that the lost object of melancholia is never separated from the sufferer because it has been incorporated into his being.

The poet devotes all of chapter 20 of his second volume (book 3) of the *Arboleda* to an adopted dog named Jazmín. The chapter begins, however, with the announcement of the birth of his and León's daughter, Aitana. In the long italicized section that serves as the usual preamble to each chapter, Alberti dedicates a poem to his child, a source of peace and joyful release

“después de tantos años de guerra y ya casi dos de exilio” (2: 112). The poem that he writes as the notice of her birth is an ode to the “viejas mares mías [. . .]. Encántamela tú, madre mar gaditana” (2: 112). He apostrophizes the maternal bay of Cádiz, asking her to bless his child with her beauty. Yet the arrival of his child, and his desire for her to inherit, as part of her character, the familiarity of Alberti’s home waters take on an aching tone in the last stanza: “¡Oh mares de desgracias, rica mar de catástrofes, / avara mar de hombres que beben agua dulce, / aquí la tenéis!” Even what is new and hopeful in the present harkens irrevocably back, back to the *arboleda perdida*. In this poem, Alberti juxtaposes the sea of his youthful home with the “ríos americanos” from which Aitana is born as “la hija de los desastres.” He locates his child and his family in a nowhere land in between two bodies of water, neither of which can sustain them.

Usually, the italicized chapter introductions represent Alberti’s thought at the moment of writing and attempt to connect the present to the memory (normally an anecdote) that will follow. This chapter constitutes one of the rare exceptions to this structural component of *Arboleda*, because what follows the poem (representing not the present but rather the year 1941) are the lines (no longer in italics, signaling that the action takes place in the past): “Me gusta mucho hablar de mis perros, es decir de mis perras: Centella, Yemi y Niebla, españolas; Tusca, Katy, Guagua, Muki, argentinas. Desde hace mucho tiempo, ellas han pasado a ser, en las constelaciones azules de los perros, estrellas de elegía” (2: 113). What remains of the chapter is the story of Alberti’s relationship with the beautiful Jazmín, “bien dorado y fuerte, este jazmín canino, el primero en toda la flora capaz de dar ladridos a la luna” (2: 114).

The exalted prose poetry with which Alberti relates the elegy of this dog is stirring and tender but seems particularly strange considering the chapter appeared to declare itself to be about Aitana. Given that Alberti normally makes use of italics in order to demonstrate a connection between the preface to the chapter and the chapter itself, we have to ask what the link, in this case, could possibly be.

The poem for Aitana deals more with Alberti's nostalgia for home and indeterminate position between two waters than it does with the theme of her birth. In the verses, the renewal of life looks backwards instead of ahead, and the story of Jazmín that immediately follows actually serves to explicate the poem rather than vice versa. A close reading of the chapter reveals how it captures the process of melancholic becoming.

For the political refugee who wants to go back home, life is lived in relation to a threshold, an inbetweenedness that must be, but is never, crossed. Dogs, particularly in the mythological traditions of many cultures, serve as faithful guardians or guides to their traveling masters. Garber points out that dogs guard thresholds and "can also protect those who wish to *cross* a threshold" (90). Because Aitana is born between the American river and the Spanish sea, her father can attempt to bridge the distance through her: "Niña que un alentado alud, [. . .] conmigo la empujaron / hacia estos numerosos kilómetros de agua" (1: 112). The wayward dog in particular embodies the experience of exile insofar as in his compassion for his master and his "memory" of his previous wandering, he can guide and guard the person through the human wait which takes place always at the gateway of the return.

In chapter 20, Alberti states that he is not going to write about just any of the dogs in the list of names he rattles off but rather only about one dog, Jazmín, because this is the one dog who was lost to him. The mystery of Jazmín's whereabouts still haunts him. The terms under which Alberti writes about this animal are reminiscent of the terms of his absence from Spain: present but unobtainable, mine but not mine, so close yet so far:

Voy a hablar de Jazmín, voy a recordarlo como aún estuviera, [. . .] porque podía tocarlo y no tocarlo, verlo y no verlo, pero siempre quererle y esperarle como a un muchacho que se le sabe encantador, loco de gracia, irresistible de personalidad, belleza y simpatía. [. . .] Una tarde, *ya entre dos luces*, apareció de pronto en el comedor de mi casa. (1: 114-15; emphasis added)

The memory of Jazmín, like the memory of Spain, is construed in terms of “as if.” And the dog himself appears “entre dos luces,” a creature born from a temporal and natural liminality. The *loss* of country, like, as we will see, the loss of the dog, becomes the object to be internalized through melancholia. I am not suggesting that the dog is an object in the guise of the mother country nor the reverse. Rather, the journey of the dog dramatizes the journey of the political or war refugee on one hand, and, on the other, the animal actually becomes the cause of melancholia through displacement. That is, by transferring his homesickness onto this symbol of unconditional love and fidelity, Alberti pursues his melancholia and simultaneously provides, through his relationship with this new love object, a model for the activity of melancholia. The dog is a particularly appropriate recipient for this displacement because he is designated by the trait of fidelity, and therefore he dramatizes the bizarre attachment to absence displayed by the melancholic subject.

Before the loss, there comes, of course, the identification, the love: “Nuestra amistad era perfecta. Tanto que pensaba: puesto que me ha elegido por dueño, no debo abandonarlo” (1: 115). Once Jazmín has installed himself happily in a life with Alberti (and we assume with María Teresa as well), the inevitable happens: he runs away. Alberti walks the beach and the streets of the town, asking if anyone has seen him. No sooner does he resign himself to his absence than the dog makes a triumphant, epic homecoming. Having escaped the cruel chains of his brutal original owner, Jazmín arrives once again on Alberti’s doorstep: “Llegaba empapado, fugitivo. Acababa de arrancarse las cadenas, aprovechando la confusión y el miedo que trae la tempestad” (1: 116). Redoubling the symbolic endowment of the dog, Alberti now shows him to be more than the ideal of his loss; he becomes the representative of Alberti, the escapee, and the dog’s stormy night journey the equivalent of his flight from wartorn Spain.

The second time around, the passion between Jazmín and Alberti reaches new heights: “me elegía, me reelegía, tomando por testigos las sombras más batidas, su único dueño. [. . .] ya

era mío y lo iba a seguir siendo mientras no se muriese" (1: 116). But one day Alberti decides to go out on his boat without him, and in his desperate fear of abandonment, the dog escapes and never returns. When Alberti recalls his identification with Jazmín, what pains him is his inability to resolve the insubstantiality of the animal's absence. He knows not if the dog is alive or dead, with a kind master or an abusive one, and missing the dog—like missing Spain—becomes a transparency of memory, memory of an absence, the loss of a loss:

Y esta vez no volvió. Y ni en el Este ni en ninguna parte pudieron decirme nada del perro. Pasados dos meses en los que me había jurado no pensar más en él, alguien me dijo: "Hemos visto a Jazmín . . ." [. . .] ¿Sería verdad? ¿Será verdad? No sé, ni ya casi me importa, porque Jazmín hoy para mí es algo más que un perro: es el aliento de los bosques, la brisa del mar, el viento de las playas, el soplo veloz de los caminos, el rayo victorioso de los médanos, el alma errante de Punta del Este. (1: 118)

What the reading of the story of Jazmín provides for the reading of the poem of the birth of Aitana is the emotional context of melancholia. It provides an explanation (an excuse) for the self-absorption of the poem, for the conditions surrounding Alberti's affective response to Aitana's coming into the world, and for the use of the conceit of the two waters. Through the beloved dog, Alberti gives an allegorical account of his escape from Spain, of the rescue and shelter provided him by Argentina, and of the affective trajectory of his displacement from Spain in which his nostalgia degenerates into melancholia.

The epigraph from Judith Butler can serve to expand on this idea. In her summary of Freud's description of melancholia, Butler paraphrases the psychoanalyst: "The lost other is not simply brought inside the ego, as one might shelter a wayward dog" (*Psychic Life* 180). Alberti does not merely house his wayward dog, rather the dog is absorbed into his life through, strange though it may seem, an identification based on existential commonalities.³ No others interfere in their love (León and daughter are conspicuously missing), and, in turn, the man-dog

relationship serves as an intersubjective locus for the annexation of loss into the ego, a performance in which the dog comes to represent both the primary lost object and Alberti himself. This overdetermination of the dog indicates that the loss of Spain becomes conflated with the loss of self. Through his stories about the reciprocal nature of dog love, Alberti invests his dogs with the capacity to stand for both sides of the melancholic process: the canine is at once the object absorbed by the melancholic and, in his longing for his master, a melancholic entity himself. The dogs become transitional objects in the Winnicottian sense, objects of relation that supplant an originary loss: the mother, Spain, the enthusiasm of communism, and so forth.

Three chapters later, in the twenty-third, Alberti picks up once again the theme of his canine devotion. He remembers how he baptized his new Argentinian home in a nostalgic gesture of evoking his first one, "la arboleda perdida," and takes in two abandoned dogs in order to help him overcome the disorientation he experienced at having the seasons reversed: "cuando vivía desterrado en el hemisferio austral, tenía cambiadas las estaciones" (2: 132). He proceeds to tell the story of Diana and Alano, keepers of his memory, "fiel guardián de La Arboleda Perdida" (2: 133). The farmers nearby hated dogs and "murder" the pair during what Alberti recalls as an especially difficult autumn: "ambos asesinatos de mis perros sucedieron en otoño" (2: 133).

He misses especially Alano long after his return to Spain and dedicates verses to the dog's memory which serve to console him: "¿en dónde estás, Alano? Y yo mismo me quiero responder desde este hemisferio, ahora, donde vivo, para consolarme" (2: 133). The poem that follows echoes the previous prose lamentation on the whereabouts of Jazmín; the longing for the dog shifts into the longing for a time past, now memory, and the memory is reformed into one of absence itself: "porque tú eras ya el alma de los bosques, y siempre / los bosques hablarán de ti mientras las brisas / agiten en sus ramas tu recuerdo" (2: 134). The choice of verb tense is as indicative of the melancholic foreclosure of the memory as the figurative language itself. While

the remembrance and longing for the dogs, both Alano in this instance and Jazmín in the previous example, have been rendered intangible and transparent by the image of the breeze and the whispering of the trees, the use of the phrasing “eras ya” emphasizes the automatic phantasmatic quality of the relationship.

As occasions for, recipients of, and models (in their own mourning) of human grief, dogs serve to elucidate the elusiveness of the melancholic’s ambivalent absent object. Dogs do not cause Alberti pain; rather, in their function as transitional tokens, their overdetermined symbolic capacity to remind him of his separation from his own absence is what wounds him so deeply. This is the mystery and the power of melancholia, that the void itself becomes our ego, our soul.

The discussion I have just put forth attempts to address what appears to be one of the paradoxes of melancholia, which is that what eventually becomes the cause of suffering is not the object but the loss in and of itself. It is this aspect of melancholia that can lend some insight as to why, in a reading of Leon’s *Memoria de la melancolía* and *La arboleda perdida*, the protagonists themselves seem, like the ghosts of their precious dogs, as ephemeral as the wind.

In her book *Black Sun: Depressions and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva describes the fugitive nature of melancholic memory this way: “Riveted to the past, regressing to the paradise or inferno of an unsurpassable experience, melancholy persons manifest a strange memory: everything has gone by, they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future” (60). After all is said and done, the “real” subject of melancholy, particularly when it blends with narcissism, is affect itself: “sadness is really the sole object; more precisely it is a substitute object they become attached to, an object they tame and cherish for lack of another” (12). What Kristeva describes so well here is the ghostly nature of the transitional object, an object that is never itself but always just loss, which brings me back to my original formulation where I contend that the dog, even in his presence, is somehow inherently reminiscent of sadness, a

formulation that Alberti himself bears witness to through his own melancholic deed of writing.

Part II: León

*"Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the
dogs of war"*

Julius Caesar, act 3, scene 1

*Indeed, testimony would not be
possible without citing the
injury for which one seeks
compensation.*

Judith Butler,
Excitable Speech: A Politics
of the Performative

After the murder of Caesar, Mark Antony calls out for the unleashing of flame, famine, and sword, the dogs of war: the chaos of the civil strife that he himself will expedite. In his cry, he foretells the particular horrors of *civil* war and, through his act of speech, conjures the events themselves. Those creatures of devastation, the dogs of destruction, are allowed to let "slip" from their restraints in order to wreak havoc. Shakespeare's phrase, ostensibly metaphoric, materializes the dogs it is meant to represent, thus collapsing figurative and literal values of the image: the vision is not of famine, sword, and flame but rather of wild canines, vicious, sick, abandoned, scavenging the carrion of battle. The performative value of Mark Antony's call attests to the primary and critical difference between *La arboleda perdida* and María Teresa León's *Memoria de la melancolía*: he cannot cite the scene of war, while she cannot leave it.

Alberti's principal autobiographic concern is to locate himself within a cultural tradition that was destroyed by the war and which he seeks to commemorate through his memoirs. In his desire to memorialize the era in which he played a role of significance, he reveals a narcissistic determination to attest to the continued vibrancy of the cultural circles where he still, at

the moment of writing, has some part. The memoirs can be read as an act of defiance that declares “we are still standing!” against the forces of fascism that sought to destroy Alberti’s political and artistic worlds. A different kind of self-presentation occurs in León’s *Memoria*, one that is ultimately in the service of solidarity at the expense of individual creative primacy.

Of all the fascinating committed leftist women who populated the socio-political and cultural landscape of the era of the Republic and the Civil War, María Teresa León stands out for the beauty and sensitivity of her literary creations as well as for her status as “the wife of Alberti”. Yet in recent years, critical works about León’s *oeuvre* have far eclipsed those written about Alberti’s memoirs. Particularly since her death in 1988, León has been the subject of numerous conference panels, plenary sessions, homages, and dozens of interpretative articles. In 1998, Castalia published Gregorio Torres Nebrera’s long-awaited critical edition of *Memoria de la melancolía*, which had never previously appeared as an annotated text. León was a prolific writer of short stories, children’s narrative and novels—all demonstrate León’s fierce and indefatigable defense of working classes, women, and children and her concern for the political and cultural health of Spain. Her cultural investments reveal León to be, in many ways, a more complex artist than her husband. She was, as I defend below, a brilliant memoirist but also an actress, a theater director and producer, and a playwright.⁴ León’s shining achievement, however, is her book of memoirs. At the age of 63 and in exile in Rome, she began to write her memory text in part to combat the creeping onset on Alzheimer’s disease. The date marked, for the collective historical record, the thirtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil war and, for León’s personal life trajectory, nearly three decades of self-removal from Spain. *Memoria de la melancolía*’s primary conceptual trope is the obsessive nature of exilic existence.

Both Alberti and León are core survivors of the Spanish Civil War, and beyond the status of their position as survivors, they are literary exiles, a role which carries the particular burden of an injunction to written testimony. There is a great deal of sur-

vivor's guilt that gets played out in their written testimonies, and that is because one talks about survival only when that survival is somehow in question. The fact of survival is apparent through the material existence of the written page, but the mechanism of survival varies according to the text. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, describes, in words that are relevant for the memory texts of León and Alberti, the crucial difference between traumatic experience and traumatic survival: "At the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life; between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Both the war and the life of exile that followed were unbearable for Alberti and León, but where their respective texts flesh out their disparities is through their "stor[ies] of the unbearable nature" of the aftermath, their written works which "cope" with tragedy differently and for different reasons.

Alberti extends and confirms his existence by concealing the trauma of the war, as event, by distancing himself from it through the poetic quaintness of the substance and the style of his books. Because León was already beginning to suffer the cruel symptoms of Alzheimer's at the time of writing *Memoria*, she clamps onto her memory of the war itself and makes a desperate and heart-rending attempt to recall the essence of the scene of the crime, the primal scene of her being, not for her own sake—for she is fading out of the world—but for the sake of posterity. Although Alberti does recount a few short episodes from the war, he never refers to any of his activities on the front lines in the traveling theater groups that entertained the militias. His memoirs are the effects and the result of a war that is never cited. I would like to suggest—taking my cue from the Butler epigraph above—that Alberti's *Arboleda* constitutes the *activity* of melancholia through a consistent concealment and displacement of the citing, sighting, and the site-ing of the war, while León's *Memoria* constitutes the affective *condition* of melancholia precisely because the circumstance of her emotional survival depends on naming, visualizing, and locating the

scene of her trauma.⁵ To put it another way, León concretizes what Alberti is hesitant even to name. What might explain these differences?

One factor that might shed some light on why León substantiates the war and Alberti occludes it has to do with the gendering of war. To win a war is in large part about confirming the virility of its victors. María Teresa León can locate herself at the scene of battles where she bravely dodged bombs and at the heroic rescue of paintings since her presence in the theater of war is automatically triumphant because she is a woman. Whether her side won the war or not takes little away from the unique valor of her participation. Not so for Alberti. Not once does he make reference to the fact that he was a soldier of the air force. In all of his volumes of the *Arboleda*, he never offers an anecdote about his propagandistic tours of the front lines: the activity for which he was most known during the war. The reality is that Alberti wore the uniform of the air force soldier but saw no military action because his physical health had been compromised in his youth as a result of tuberculosis. So, rather than write about episodes that undermine his sense of agency, he chooses his victories as a poet as the subject matter for his life story.

But there is a second explanation that is more relevant to my purposes here. Ian Hacking, in his book *Rewriting the Soul* about multiple personality and the politics of memory, makes an important distinction between a concern with hiding memory and a concern with losing memory. The titles of the Spaniards' memoirs point to this opposition. Her text can be seen as a meditation on the memory of melancholia, that is, the joining of identity with infinite, fatal sadness. His books, conversely, avoid León's model of existential condition by reproducing, through his collection of the fallen leaves of his lost grove, the repetitious and evasive functioning of melancholia. Her writing feels melancholy; his emulates it. León's *Memoria* strives to locate the memories she is in danger of losing because of her senility, while Alberti, who has no fear of memory loss but does display a great deal of anxiety about the memories themselves, engages in a kind of writing that constantly defers and refers the origin of his malady. He dresses up the terms of his melancholia, refusing

to be present for his affective history, while León lays bare her aching soul with such pathos, making her writing an act of exposure that bears witness to its desire for perpetuity.

I am not sure if it is perversely funny or insufferably pitiful that León also uses an anecdote about a dog to locate through memory the very thing that Alberti uses dogs to hide: the scene of the trauma of war. What is equally intriguing is that the dog appears, as it did in Alberti, on the heels of the announcement of the birth of their daughter Aitana. In fact, in an eight-page section that constitutes what I see as the core anecdotes of the text in which she provides the rationale for the writing of the autobiography itself, León weaves the life story of their dog Niebla together with the threads of memories of the most important events of her life: falling in love with Alberti, the birth of their only child, and the outbreak of the civil war.

Memoria is composed, structurally, not by chapters but by sections that are separated only by blank spaces. In this way León captures the flux of memory, with its jumps and pauses. Early on in the book, León presents a series of ruminations and memories that flow in the following order: she recalls the flood of refugees that arrived in Argentina after the civil war and calls them “gente marcada”; she then tries to shut out the sounds of voices that invade her mind, including one that tells her that once she gives birth to her child, “verás como te barre los recuerdos. ¿El recuerdo de mis últimos pasos en Madrid? No, no, eso no” (30); she reminds herself of the glory of the war and the nobility of those who survived it; and then in the last line of the section, León shuts off her wandering images and gives notice of Aitana’s birth (31).⁶ What follows is a blank space, and the next section begins “Estoy cansada de no saber dónde morirme” (31).

León makes little effort to explain the logic of the order of her thoughts. Speaking to those who did not know the war, she calls on “them” (“us”) to understand who the Spanish war exiles were: “¿No comprendéis? Nosotros somos aquellos que miraron a sus pensamientos uno por uno durante treinta años” (32). The statement emulates the written product itself, for the book is but a collection of thoughts, each one stared at and

examined over the course of the long expulsion from home. Still addressing the future generations of Spain, León suggests an agenda for rebuilding her nation, telling them that they must uncover the lost paradise from underneath the rubble of war. The next sentence (no blank space comes before it) is: “Aquel perro era la estampa de la gratitud” (33). Now the narrative movement from the birth of Aitana, to a description of the emotional immobility of the exiles, to an entreaty to the future of Spain proceeds along a chain of ideas in which Aitana is León’s contribution to the future of Spain. The sudden switch to the dog, particularly considering that the noun is qualified by the adjective “aquel” (as if he ought to be known), indicates a conceptual leap that may make sense to León but which stumps the reader.

With a badly broken leg, Niebla arrives, “una de esas noches españolas de disparos y angustia,” in the arms of Pablo Neruda, who has saved the dog from certain death. Although the war had not yet officially begun, the violence of the weeks just prior to the war had already touched Alberti and León when the poet received a death threat. The little dog lives with the couple and experiences the outbreak of the war *in their stead*. In the summer of 1936, Alberti and León were vacationing in Ibiza when the war broke out. Since the island fell immediately to the rebel forces, the couple was forced to hide out for twenty days in the coastal mountains. Back in Madrid, Niebla faces the chaos and the terror of the first days of the rebellion. León draws the parallel between the canine and the human existential reaction to war: “*La historia de Niebla es como la nuestra*” (35; emphasis added).

When León’s mother receives word that the couple has been executed by firing squad, she gives the dog away to the garbage collector who, once Alberti and León have returned to Madrid safe and sound, refuses to restore Niebla to its rightful owners unless they help his son join the Communist Youth. The dual homecoming is impassioned for the masters and their charge: “pero nos perdonaba todo y nosotros le besamos la cabeza sucia y maloliente, explicándole con un suspiro: Niebla, es la guerra . . . Más tarde, la Niebla vio de cerca la guerra. La artillería zumbaba a lo lejos [. . .]” (35). The lost and found dynamic of

suffering, exile, loss, and homecoming is articulated in León's text in a fashion quite similar to Alberti's. The trials and the tribulations of the animal allegorize those of the human counterpart, and are therefore worth quoting at length:

La guerra arremetió contra el mar, levantó las mesas y tiró los manteles y vertió la sal [. . .]. La guerra dispersó a los niños que jugaban y las mujeres que preparaban la comida. Huyeron los que cantaban en la fuente. Todo lo que tú no hubieras hecho jamás lo hacían ellos, se clavaban los dientes, se mordían la carne, la desgarraban [. . .]. Te sorprendió que todas las mujeres de la casa saliesen. [. . .] Pero, no, te abandonan por la vida huyendo de la muerte. Llegó un camión. Se llenó de mujeres aterradas y tú corriste detrás de él con toda tu maravillosa juventud, con toda tu alegría, con toda tu fuerza, porque creíste que te pedían que jugases. . . . ¡Más, un poquito más, Niebla! Se te atragantó el aire, jadeaste. ¡Resiste! Es tan difícil correr detrás de un camión, en una carretera donde todo huye . . . ¡Resiste! ¡Cómo ayudarte si los niños quedan abandonados y la madre grita que ha olvidado, con el miedo, al más chico en la cama! ¡Resiste! Todo bulle, se lamenta y llora. Tú corres, jadeas . . . ¡Resiste! Eso le pedían al pobre pueblo español: ¡Resiste! ¿Cómo? No sé, Niebla, en qué momento tus cuatro patitas se doblaron y te quedaste tendida en la cuneta, con la lengua de clavel fuera . . . ¡Cómo son los hombres! pensarías oscuramente, y te envolviste en tu piel gris de plata, descorazonada de los hombres para siempre. (36)

Niebla's dying moments are darkened all the more by his loss of faith in humanity, a loss of faith that, like the dog, marked ("gente marcada") León permanently. The dog's emotional trajectory and war trauma are not "like" her own; they *are* her own.⁷ In the next paragraph, León explains that the people who knock on her door in Rome have lost their materiality, both temporal and affective. The people are other Spanish exiles whom she sees "como reflejos, como luces" (36).

She goes on to question the substantive existence of everything she remembers from Spain: the trees, the facade of a church, her youthful self who once crossed *la calle Alcalá* on the arm of a young poet (37). Feeling that her old age has been assigned to her by accident, León dissociates from her self in the present (becoming “ella”), “creyendo que es entonces y han distribuido mal los papeles y le han dado por equivocación el de la vieja,” and wonders if there is any way to bridge the gap between the trauma of the past and the irreality of the present. There is not: “no consigue unir las dos partes de su corazón” (37).

León’s exposition of dog love is immediate and direct: she sustains that the dog’s life is like her own and she explains that the pain of all that she lost as a result of the war has been displaced onto animals. Apostrophizing Niebla, she cries: “no comprendes nuestra ternura que viene de tan lejos y la hemos ido traspasando a todos los perros que se acercaron a nuestra vida” (34). Part of my evaluation of *Memoria* and *Arboleda* is based on the reader’s perception that León and Alberti are ghost-like as autobiographical protagonists. But this effect, in so far as it is in part a function of dog love, is produced quite differently in each text. León allows herself (and her reader) a psychological affinity with dogs that is not mediated by the fear of pain. Her text is both the result and the origin of a feeling of such overwhelming sadness caused by the realization that life has become the effort of holding on to what little memory of melancholia her fading mind will afford her. Identity is only as stable and as vital as the memories that construct it. When, by the end of *Memoria*, León has nothing left to recount other than the death notices of her friends and peers, memory itself takes a frightening and nihilistic turn in that it no longer sustains life but points inexorably toward death:

No, no se quedan solos los muertos, nos vamos quedando solos los vivos. Ahora persigo sombras. Tengo miedo de ser como esos muchachos que en mi tiempo veían a una chica y la perseguían, en los balcones, en los tranvías, en el cruce de las calles, y no se conformaban con correr detrás de una sombra incierta; preguntaban a todos, pero era inútil, porque sólo corría delante de sus ojos lo que no era,

lo que no volvería a ser nunca porque lo había barrido la mano de la noche. (259)

Unlike Alberti, for León there is no point in pretense, there is no self ahead in the future, only the certainty of forgetting, nothing but “memoria del olvido, memoria melancólica, a medio apagar, memoria de la melancolía. Vivir no es tan importante como recordar” (60). Like the temporary canine companions, always exiles themselves, who mark the passage of time in her unending homelessness, León has been broken by inhumanity and rendered the phantom of her past, alive only insofar as she can remember. One lost dog stands in for the collectivity of strays, and likewise León is but one voice of “nosotros, los desterrados,” shackled to a condition of absence. In María Teresa’s world of words, melancholia is more than a literary vehicle used to express the process of its own becoming, and it is more than suffering; it is life itself:

Un día voy a decir a mi perro: Anda, vete, te dejo en libertad. Pero me da pena pensar que bajaría la cabeza, me miraría con sus ojitos de oro y volvería para acurrucarse a mis pies. (268)

If she lets slip the dogs of war, she has nothing left.

NOTES

1. Alberti began the first volume of *La arboleda perdida* in 1939 and continued to make additions to it over the course of the next twenty years, publishing the first volume in 1959. The second volume was published in 1987. Although Alberti eventually published another book in his memoir cycle, I am interested only in the first two volumes primarily because the third was not written as a book but is a compilation of his memoirist commentaries published by *El País*.

2. My recourse to popular culture in this instance is not unjustified. *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* is a musical treatise (in the tradition of double albums and “Rock Operas”) on melancholia that goes beyond the kind of facile teenage angst typical of some popular music.

The length of the album is also worth commenting on. It is a double album of twenty-eight tracks, all of which have nostalgia, suicide, depression, anger as their theme. The combination of the subject matter and the sheer quantity of musical production is, in and of itself, a sign of songwriter Billy Corgan's (personal) knowledge of the theme of melancholia as demonstrated by lyrics such as "I sensed my loss before I even learned to talk" and these, which reflect the narcissistic brand of melancholia: "the useless drag of another day / the endless drag of a death rock boy / glitter burned by restless thoughts of being forgotten / desperate and displeased with whoever you are / and you're a star."

3. To "be like a dog" is not only to be lowly or a dirty scoundrel. Aside from all of the plays on the words "dog" and "life"—"it's a dog's life" and so on—having a life as a dog has certain associations with the theme of abandonment. The 1985 Swedish film, *My Life as a Dog*, deals precisely with death and desertion. Garber remarks: "Over the entire film there hovers like a dark ghost the boy's phantasmatic passion for, and periodic visions of, the Russian space dog Laika, who is linked to both the dying mother and the unwillingly abandoned pet dog, and who also, quite clearly, is a double for the boy" (72). The Russian space dog was sent off into orbit by the Soviets only to be deserted there, left to die in space when the air in Sputnik 2 ran out.

4. See Gregorio Torres Nebrera's splendid introduction to the 1998 Castalia edition of *Memoria de la melancolía* for a detailed account of León's cultural texts and political activities.

5. Randolph Pope offers a reading of Alberti's and León's respective memoirs that I see as a corollary to mine. He also finds "la autobiografía [. . .] soterrada y reprimida en el aparente espejo calmo de las memorias" (370). Reading through what he sees to be a series of blatant omissions in the *Arboleda*, Pope concludes that Alberti assumes the autobiographical stance of an "ex," "de lo que se pudo haber sido" (373). I find this notion about a gap between the reality of identity in the present and the ideal of identity in the past to be suggestive of my claim that Alberti is an autobiographical presence exterior to his own history.

6. All quotes from *Memoria de la melancolía* are taken from the 1979 Bruguera edition.

7. This anecdote about Niebla also appears in León's novel *Juego Limpio* (1959). There León appears in a minor role as her "historical" self, the leader of the *Guerrillas de teatro*. The León character is asked to narrate this story about Niebla, a narration which, like Alberti's anecdotes about dogs, serves to frame tales from the human history of the civil war. For a perceptive reading of the autobiographical interdependence of *Memoria* and *Juego Limpio*, see Melissa Stewart's "Poet

Wives María Teresa León and Anna Murià Tell their Stories in Alternative Texts." *Letras Peninsulares* 11 (1998).

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